

Remarks on the Return of United States Navy Aircraft Crewmembers From China

April 12, 2001

Good afternoon. A short time ago I had the opportunity to speak to the 24 members of our United States flightcrew and welcome them home to America.

I told them they represent the best of American patriotism and service to their country. They did their duty with honor and with great professionalism. They are a reminder of the debt of gratitude all Americans owe to the men and women who wear our country's uniform and who voluntarily risk their lives in the service of freedom.

We are proud of our crew. And I am glad that they will be with their families this Easter weekend.

I know I speak for all Americans in saluting their courage and the extraordinary skill of the pilot, Navy Lieutenant Osborn, who guided the severely damaged aircraft to an emergency landing that saved 24 lives.

We're looking forward to talking with the flightcrew about exactly how the accident happened. From all the evidence we have seen, the United States aircraft was operating in international airspace in full accordance with all laws, procedures, and regulations and did nothing to cause the accident.

The United States and China have agreed that representatives of our Governments will meet on April 18th to discuss the accident. I will ask our United States representative to ask the tough questions about China's recent practice of challenging United States aircraft operating legally in international airspace.

Reconnaissance flights are a part of a comprehensive national security strategy that helps maintain peace and stability in our world. During the last 11 days, the United States and China have confronted strong emotions, deeply held and often conflicting convictions, and profoundly different points of view. China's decision to prevent the return of our crew for 11 days is inconsistent with the kind of relationship we have both said we wish to have.

As we move forward, the United States and China will no doubt again face difficult

issues and fundamental disagreements. We disagree on important basic issues such as human rights and religious freedom. At times, we have different views about the path to a more stable and secure Asian-Pacific region.

We have different values, yet common interests in the world. We agree on the importance of trade, and we want to increase prosperity for our citizens. We want the citizens of both our countries to enjoy the benefits of peace in the world, so we need to work together on global security problems, such as preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

I will always stand squarely for American interests and American values. And those will no doubt sometimes cause disagreements with China. Yet, I will approach our differences in a spirit of respect.

The kind of incident we have just been through does not advance a constructive relationship between our two countries. Both the United States and China must make a determined choice to have a productive relationship that will contribute to a more secure, more prosperous, and more peaceful world.

I know I speak for all Americans when I say, welcome home to our flightcrew. I want to thank the families for your patience and for your sacrifice, and I wish all my fellow Americans a rich and meaningful Easter and Passover.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Shane Osborn, USN.

Statement on Federal Regulations on Privacy of Medical Records

April 12, 2001

Today I directed Secretary Thompson to allow a Federal rule that will protect the privacy of medical information for millions of Americans to become effective. For the first time, patients will have full access to their medical records and more control over how their personal information will be used and disclosed. The rule also provides a clear avenue of recourse for those Americans whose medical privacy has been compromised.